THE SUBCULTURE AND PUBLIC

IMAGES OF CLIMBERS

A Dissertation Presented
By

PETER ALEXANDER DONELLY

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Department of Sport Studies
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Approved as to style and content by:

Prof. John W. Loy, Chairperson of Committee

Judith A. Toyama, Member

Prof. Harold VanderZwanz, Department Head
Department of Sport Studies
ABSTRACT
The Subculture and Public Image of Climbers
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Peter Alexander Donnelly
B.A., Hunter College, C.U.N.Y.
M.S., University of Massachusetts
Ph.D., University of Massachusetts
Directed by: Professor John W. Loy

Two integrated studies were carried out in order to examine the subculture and public image of climbers. Study I employed interviews and participant observation in order to gather data on the meanings and ways and social organization of the subculture of climbers. In addition to describing the types of climbing and the manner in which climbs are conducted, data were presented on socialization into and desocialization from the subculture, types of climbers and interactions among climbers, and the concerns and cultural characteristics of climbers. The manner in which climbing is governed by a set of socially constructed and widely accepted ethics was also described. Previous research and theoretical work on subcultures was examined critically, and suggestions were made regarding the distinction between ascribed and achieved subcultures, the reification of subcultures for the purposes of research, and the types of attributes and behaviors that are likely to lead to subculture formation. These suggestions were incorporated with the data gathered on the subculture of climbers.

Study II employed questionnaire data, participant observation and unobtrusive measures in order to determine the public image of climbers.
and the climbers interviewed for Study I provided their assessment of the public image of climbers. The data appeared to indicate that climbing was perceived to be a semi-deviant activity, although among the younger respondents to the questionnaire there was a tendency to label the sport as individualistic rather than semi-deviant. In addition, a lack of understanding and a curiosity about climbing were apparent. The data were discussed in terms of the labelling approach to the study of deviance, the tendency to attach stereotypes to attributes and behaviors, and the concept of semi-deviance.

The two studies were integrated with respect to subcultures and labelling, and an interface between the two theoretical areas was proposed with the processes of identification and identity formation. It was concluded that a link exists between the formation of subcultures and the process of labelling, and that subcultures affect their public image, and are in turn affected by their public image.